Behind the Scenes

February 2021

Friends of the LWC
LUCKIAMUTE WATERSHED COUNCIL

Dear Friend,

In Celtic tradition, February 1 marks the festival of Imbolc or Candlemas, also called Brigid's Day. This day falls about halfway between the winter solstice and the spring equinox, and heralds the first stirrings of Spring. Indeed, the signs of Spring are all around us whispering the promise of renewal and hidden potential. The days are growing longer, the crocus and daffodil bulbs are emerging from their slumber, buds on many trees are already beginning to swell, and lambing season is in full swing — all of which are universal signs of hope, optimism and rebirth.

Although many of us put forth our New Year Resolutions on January 1, many traditional cultures around the world instead devote the month of February to clearing out the old and making space for new beginnings. This can be done in many ways, from spring cleaning your home to planning the layout of your garden. ***Speaking of the latter, I hope you will join us for our "Planning & Planting Your Native Garden" workshop on February 9 (see below)!***

For the Luckiamute Watershed Council, mid-winter marks our busiest planting season. With the steady amounts of rain over the past couple months, the ground is soft and full of moisture, allowing root networks to grow long and strong in preparation for the coming Spring growth spurt. Inside this issue, Assistant Project Manager Aubrey Cloud will give you a "behind the scenes" look at restoration planting and reveal how far we've come in the art and science of planting trees. Also in this issue, you will see an invitation to start saving your favorite photos of the watershed for our upcoming 20th Anniversary Photo Contest! More details and the full contest guidelines will be sent to your inbox and posted to our website soon, so stay tuned!

--Suzanne Teller, LWC Outreach Coordinator (contact me at Outreach@LuckiamuteLWC.org or 503-837-0237)

Upcoming Love Your Watershed Events:

Planning & Planting Your Native Garden

February 9 @ 2:00 - 3:30pm

https://www.luckiamutelwc.org/native-plant-workshop.html

In this virtual workshop, you will learn how to identify your soil types and pick the best native plants for your yard and garden! You'll also hear about some of our favorite natives, why they are important, and where to plant them. *Workshop partners include North Santiam Watershed Council and Marion, Polk, Benton and Yamhill Soil & Water Conservation Districts.*

LWC 20th Anniversary Photo Contest

Coming Spring 2021!

Show what you love about your watershed by entering your favorite photographs in the LWC 20th Anniversary Photo Contest! You will be able to enter up to two photographs in each of six categories (Water, Wildlife, Plants, People, Landscapes, and Youth Entries). All photographs must be taken within the LWC service area, which includes the Luckiamute and Ash Creek watersheds as well as the Duck Slough/American Bottom watersheds *(you can view a map of our service area at www.luckiamutelwc.org/our-watershed).*

Stay tuned for more details, coming soon!

Watershed Notes

Restoration Planting — an Exciting Frontier

by Aubrey Cloud, LWC Assistant Project Manager

Wintertime in the Willamette Valley. The trees have cast off all rustling echoes of 2020, and now slumber in stoic expectation of a new year, chlorophylled with possibility. The rivers and streams ebb and flow with each cloudburst. While the land is hibernating, your favorite watershed council is gearing up for its most anticipated field season – planting!

D. Franco Contracting, Inc. crewmembers are finishing up the planting of 55,000 native trees and shrub saplings at the LSNA Floodplain Reconnection Project site this week.

From the mouth of the Luckiamute River at Luckiamute State Natural Area (LSNA), the crown jewel of our watershed, to headwaters in the Coast range, contract crews will soon be adding over 90,000 new native plants to the milestone of one million we hit last year. These efforts are the culmination of months of planning and logistics, built atop a foundation of innovation within the restoration profession that has transformed the way practitioners approach these projects.

Back in the "AOL-ocene" (~1985-2002), restoration projects were much more limited in their scope. We still used containerized plant stock for most projects, which imposed hard logistical limits on how many plants a small nonprofit could afford, much less fit in a truck and deliver to a site. This all changed when pioneering restorationists decided to take a cue from the forestry industry and started using bareroot seedling stock. By switching to bareroots, project managers and planting crews could suddenly start installing thousands, or even hundreds of thousands, of native plants in a single season. This meant they could take on much larger projects.

Multi-layered, mixed species riparian forests provide habitat for more species and greater numbers of wildlife. A greater variety of trees and shrubs also increases the resilience of the forest to pest outbreaks, disturbance and climate change.

However, the goals of a restoration project are different than those of an industrial forestry operation. We're trying to resuscitate complex, diverse systems that either directly or indirectly support as many wildlife species as possible, while also jump-starting the ability of a degraded system to naturally regenerate itself. As such, our industry's vanguards didn't want to mimic the single-species, even-aged stands that typify timberlands. Instead, our designs incorporate palettes of trees and shrubs that are best suited for specific site conditions and can maximize diversity of species as well as create a multi-layered, vertical canopy structure. This approach has empowered the cause of restoration to have a much larger impact than it could have imagined mere decades ago.

In fact, the LWC's pride and joy, LSNA, is one of the early sites where this new approach was put into action and is special as a large-scale publicly accessible site. In addition to efforts at Clean Water Services in Tualatin, early work at LSNA demonstrated how viable this new approach, termed Rapid Riparian Revegetation, or R3, was. Hundreds of acres, four project phases (with a fifth in the wings) and a couple new forests later, and we'd say the results continue to speak for themselves (seriously, visit LSNA if you haven't already!).

While most of our modern sciences are young when held up against the expanse of human civilization, disciplines dedicated to the repair of our shared world are among the most novel. That could be disheartening by one view; we are only just starting to grapple with the devastation wrought over past centuries, and there is quite a lot of ecological red in that ledger.

On the other hand, it is also a tremendously exciting thought. How thrilling, to be on the frontier of a new human endeavor? What a privilege it is to start laying the groundwork now for what could be a transformative discipline for humankind and our relationship with the land that sustains us? If we get this right, then we might just be able to leave our grandchildren a richer, healthier, and more vibrant world than the one we inherited.

It starts with figuring out how to go from planting hundreds of plants on less than one acre to planting hundreds of thousands on hundreds of acres. What will the next big innovation in restoration be? You're in the right place to find out, and your continued support makes it possible!